

# Statistics in focus

## POPULATION AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

THEME 3 – 11/2001

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## Causes of death among young people aged 15 to 24 1994/1997

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On average, 29,000 young people aged 15 to 24 in the Union lose their lives each year. Improvements in medical care have not had as large an impact on the number of deaths among the young as they have had on the rest of the population. Deaths among this age-group tend to be the result of the lifestyle young people lead. Indeed, as many as 19,000 deaths are due to external causes of injury and poisoning.

Traffic accidents<sup>1</sup> claim the lives of almost 11,000 young people each year (almost 40% of the total number of deaths). Around 80% of the victims are male. EU-wide, young males aged 15-24 are twice as likely as 35-44 year-olds to die on the roads.

EU-wide, there are around 3,600 recorded suicides every year although the exact figure is may be higher due to the differences in national recording and certification practices. Cancer accounts for around 2,400 deaths.

Overall, men are almost three times more likely than women to die between the ages of 15 and 24. There are, however, considerable differences in causes of death between the sexes. For example, 13% of deaths among young women are due to cancer compared with only 7% of deaths among men of the same age.

EU-wide, the mortality rate for this age-group was 59 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. Portugal has by far the largest incidence of deaths (97 per 100,000 inhabitants) among young people while Sweden (39) has the lowest.

In most Member States, traffic accidents are by far the most common cause of death among the young. However, in Finland, young people are more likely to commit suicide than die on the roads. Belgium, Greece, Austria and Portugal have the worst record of traffic accident fatalities while Sweden enjoys the lowest rate. If other Member States had Sweden's safety record, almost 6,000 young lives could be saved every year on the Union's roads.

The overall number of deaths among young people has decreased significantly since 1970, largely due to the significant reduction in road traffic deaths. However, the number of suicides and deaths due to self-inflicted injuries has risen in some countries.

<sup>1</sup> Data include all types of transport accidents (road, rail, sea and air) although road traffic accidents account for the vast majority of deaths in this category. The term "Traffic accidents" is used as a synonym of transport accidents.

## Introduction

The statistics used in this report represent the annual average number of deaths per 100,000 inhabitants recorded over the period 1994-1997. Data refer to the 'underlying' cause of death, as stated on the death certificate. One of the weaknesses of such data is that

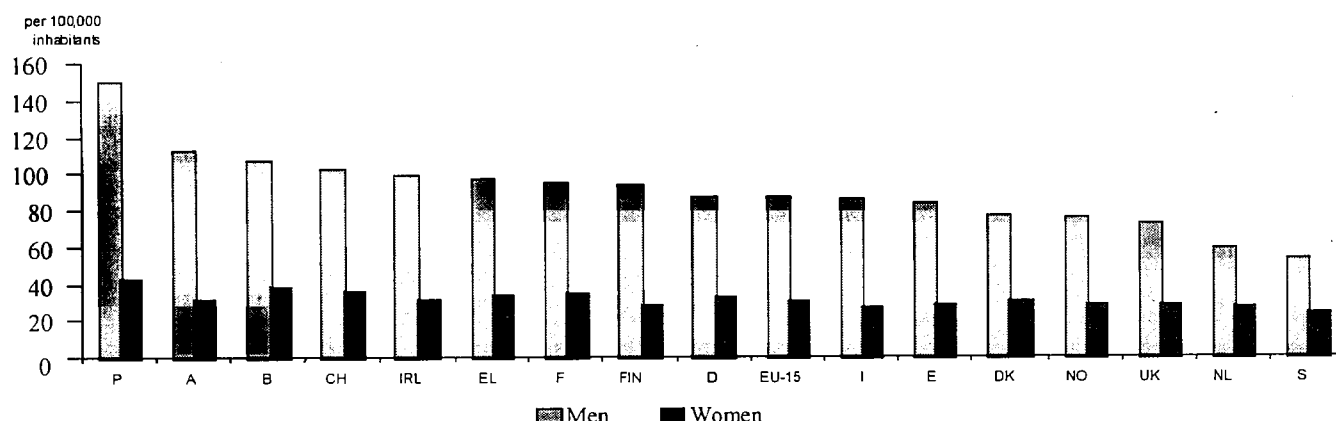
some external causes such as environmental or behavioural factors do not appear on the death certificate. For example, if someone is killed in a road accident while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, this will be recorded as a road traffic death.

### Many more men than women die between the ages of 15 and 24

There are almost 50 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24 living in the European Union. During the period 1994-1997, an average of 29,000 deaths were recorded each year among this age-group. This represents 59 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. Although mortality in this age-group accounts for less than 1% of all deaths, more than 19,000 of the deaths are due to external causes of injury and poisoning (intentional or

otherwise). Portugal has by far the largest death rates (97 per 100,000 inhabitants) among young people. Belgium and Austria (both 73) and Switzerland (69) lie significantly above the EU average. In contrast, young people aged 15 to 24 are least likely to die in Sweden (39 per 100,000), the Netherlands (43), the United Kingdom (51), Norway (52) and Denmark (53). (figure 1).

figure 1 : Death rates among young people aged 15-24 by sex annual average 1994/1997



EU-wide, men are almost three times more likely than women to die between the ages of 15 and 24 : 21,900 male deaths compared with 7,400 female deaths.

The gap between the sexes tends to be larger in countries where the overall mortality rate is higher and smaller in countries where the rate is lower (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of deaths (and rates) among young people aged 15-24 by sex, EU-15, annual average 1994-1997

	Number of deaths			Rates per 100,000 inhabitants		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
EU-15	29359	21940	7419	59	87	31
B	474	351	122	73	106	38
DK	280	204	76	53	76	30
D	5572	4125	1447	60	87	32
EL	1022	769	253	66	97	33
E	3625	2730	895	56	83	29
F	5178	3833	1345	64	94	34
IRL	417	320	98	66	99	32
I	4481	3452	1029	56	85	26
L	40	28	13	.	.	.
NL	877	610	267	43	59	27
A	739	580	159	73	112	32
P	1566	1222	344	97	149	43
FIN	389	302	88	61	93	28
S	316	222	95	39	53	24
UK	3757	2745	1012	51	72	28
IS	18	14	4	.	.	.
NO	306	225	81	52	75	28
CH	582	434	148	69	102	36

No rates are presented for L and IS due to the small number of cases



## Accidents account for almost half the deaths among young people

Across the Union, accidents are the prime cause of death among young people. Almost 14,000 young people die every year as the result of accidents in the Union. This represents 47% of the total number of deaths. Around 11,000 of these deaths are due to traffic accidents, the vast majority of which occur on the Union's roads.

More than 8,000 are young men. EU-wide, there are around 3,600 recorded suicides every year although the exact figure is unknown due to the differences in national recording and medical practices. Cancer accounts for around 2,400 deaths (Table 2).

Table 2: Main causes of death among young people aged 15-24, EU-15, annual average 1994/1997

	Total		Men	Women
	Number	Share (%)	Share (%)	Share (%)
<b>All causes of death (A00-Y89)</b>	<b>29359</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>External causes of injury and poisoning (V01-Y89)</b>	<b>19115</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>52</b>
... Accidents (V01-X59)	13867	47	51	37
..... Transport accidents (V01-V99)	10990	37	40	30
..... Accidental falls (W00-W19)	447	2	2	1
..... Accidental poisoning (X40-X49)	674	2	2	2
... Suicide and intentional self-harm (X60-X84)	3675	13	13	10
... Homicide, assault (X85-Y09)	585	2	2	2
... Events of undetermined intent (Y10-Y34)	972	3	3	3
<b>Malignant neoplasms (C00-C97)</b>	<b>2464</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>
... Malignant neoplasm of lymphatic/haematopoietic tissue (C81-C96)	1013	3	3	5
<b>Diseases of the circulatory system (I00-I99)</b>	<b>1431</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Diseases of the nervous system and the sense organs (G00-H95)</b>	<b>1104</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Mental and behavioural disorders (F00-F99)</b>	<b>839</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
... Drug dependence, toxicomania (F11-F16,F18-F19)	760	3	3	2
<b>Infectious and parasitic diseases (A00-B99)</b>	<b>752</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Diseases of the respiratory system (J00-J99)</b>	<b>640</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Congenital malformations and chromosomal abnormalities (Q00-Q99)</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases (E00-E90)</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Symptoms, signs, abnormal findings, ill-defined causes (R00-R99)</b>	<b>1348</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Other causes</b>	<b>793</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>

## Young men are more accident-prone than young women

There are significant differences in the causes of death (COD) between young men and women. EU-wide, accidents account for 52% of all young male deaths compared with only 37% of all female deaths. Transport accident deaths make up 41% of the male total against

30% of the female total. Suicides (13%) are the second most common cause of death among 15 to 24 year old men, followed by cancer (7%). Among women, on the other hand, cancer accounts for 13% of all deaths followed by suicide (10%) (figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2: Main causes of death among young men, EU-15, annual average 1994-1997

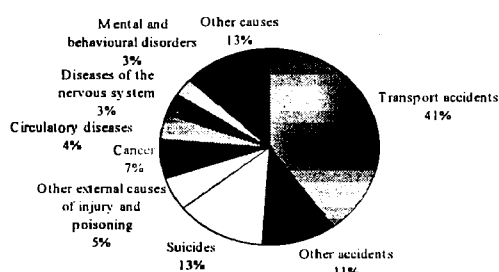
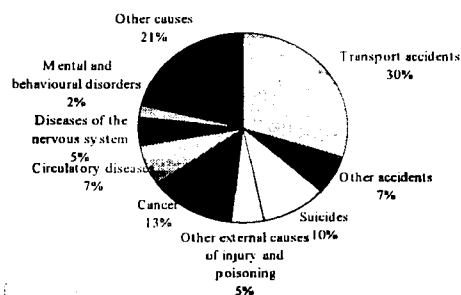


Figure 3: Main causes of death among young women, EU-15, annual average 1994-1997



For both sexes, around 40% of cancers are those of the lymphatic/haematopoietic tissue. Other causes of death among young people include circulatory diseases (5%),

diseases of the nervous system (4%) and mental and behavioural disorders (3%) which include drugs.

Table 3 and 4 provide detailed breakdowns of the causes of death for each Member State.

	Rates per 100,000 inhabitants																
	EU-15	B	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK	NO	CH
<b>All causes of death (A00-Y89)</b>	87	106	76	87	97	83	94	99	85	59	112	149	93	53	72	75	102
<b>External causes of injury and poisoning (V01-Y89)</b>	60	87	56	62	75	57	68	74	57	36	92	85	76	37	46	53	68
... Accidents (V01-X59)	44	59	40	45	69	48	48	46	46	25	66	65	31	20	28	30	39
..... Transport accidents (V01-V99)	35	50	33	40	53	32	38	32	37	21	50	54	22	15	19	17	25
..... Accidental falls (W00-W19)	1	1	0	1	3	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	2
..... Accidental poisoning (X40-X49)	2	3	3	0	5	4	0	4	1	1	8	3	3	1	4	0	6
... Suicide and intentional self-harm (X60-X84)	12	22	12	13	4	8	14	26	8	9	24	5	39	13	10	16	26
... Homicide, assault (X85-Y09)	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	3	2	0	2	3	1	2	6	2
... Events of undetermined intent (Y10-Y34)	3	3	3	2	0	0	4	1	1	0	1	13	3	3	7	0	1
<b>Malignant neoplasms (C00-C97)</b>	6	5	5	5	6	7	5	6	7	7	6	7	5	4	5	4	6
... Malignant neoplasm of lymphatic/haematopoietic tissue (C81-C96)	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	3	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	2
<b>Diseases of the circulatory system (I00-I99)</b>	4	4	2	4	4	5	3	5	4	3	5	5	2	2	3	2	3
<b>Diseases of the nervous system and the sense organs (G00-H95)</b>	3	2	2	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	3	4	2	2	4	3	3
<b>Mental and behavioural disorders (F00-F99)</b>	3	1	0	4	0	0	2	4	4	0	3	0	1	2	4	4	11
... Drug dependence, toxicomania (F11-F16,F18-F19)	2	0	0	4		0	1	4	4	0	2	0	1	1	4	3	10
<b>Infectious and parasitic diseases (A00-B99)</b>	2	1	1	1	1	4	1	2	1	1	1	12	1	1	2	1	2
<b>Diseases of the respiratory system (J00-J99)</b>	2	1	0	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	4	1	0	2	1	1
<b>Congenital malformations and chromosomal abnormalities (Q00-Q99)</b>	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	2
<b>Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases (E00-E90)</b>	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Symptoms, signs, abnormal findings, ill-defined causes (R00-R99)</b>	4	3	6	4	1	1	7	0	3	5	0	29	1	1	1	2	5
No rates are presented for L and IS due to the small number of cases.																	
Data for Portugal should be treated with caution due to the relatively high rates of unknown causes (codes Y10-Y34 and R00-R99).																	

**Table 4: Main causes of death among young women aged 15-24, annual average 1994/1997**

	Rates per 100,000 inhabitants																
	EU-15	B	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK	NO	CH
<b>All causes of death (A00-Y89)</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>External causes of injury and poisoning (V01-Y89)</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>
... Accidents (V01-X59)	11	15	8	13	19	11	14	10	10	7	15	13	7	6	7	8	11
..... Transport accidents (V01-V99)	9	13	7	12	12	9	11	8	9	6	12	12	6	5	5	5	8
..... Accidental falls (W00-W19)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
..... Accidental poisoning (X40-X49)	1	2	1	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	1
... Suicide and intentional self-harm (X60-X84)	3	5	3	4	1	2	4	5	2	4	4	2	8	4	2	4	6
... Homicide, assault (X85-Y09)	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	2	1
... Events of undetermined intent (Y10-Y34)	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	3	1	1	2	0	1
<b>Malignant neoplasms (C00-C97)</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
... Malignant neoplasm of lymphatic/haematopoietic tissue (C81-C96)	2	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1
<b>Diseases of the circulatory system (I00-I99)</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Diseases of the nervous system and the sense organs (G00-H95)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Mental and behavioural disorders (F00-F99)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
... Drug dependence, toxicomania (F11-F16,F18-F19)	1	0	0	1		0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	3
<b>Infectious and parasitic diseases (A00-B99)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Diseases of the respiratory system (J00-J99)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Congenital malformations and chromosomal abnormalities (Q00-Q99)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases (E00-E90)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Symptoms, signs, abnormal findings, ill-defined causes (R00-R99)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>

No rates are presented for L and IS due to the small number of cases.

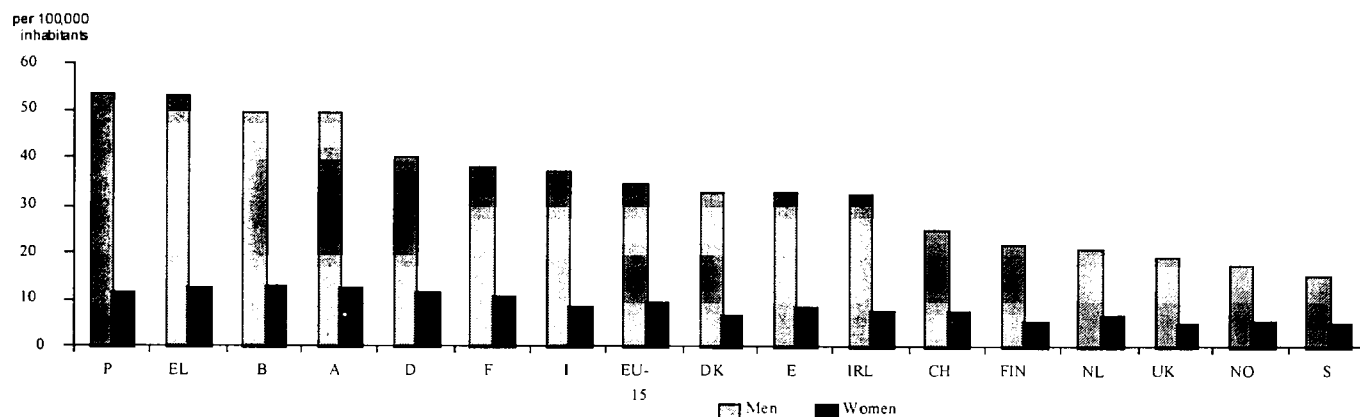
Data for Portugal should be treated with caution due to the relatively high rates of unknown causes (codes Y10-Y34 and R00-R99).

## Significant differences in the COD rates between Member States

The chances of a young person dying in a traffic accident vary greatly from one Member State to another. Belgium, Greece, Austria and Portugal have the highest rates of death due to transport accidents; Sweden, the United Kingdom and Norway have the

lowest (figure 4). If other Member States were able to reduce their rates to the level of Sweden, almost 6,000 deaths could be avoided on the Union's roads every year.

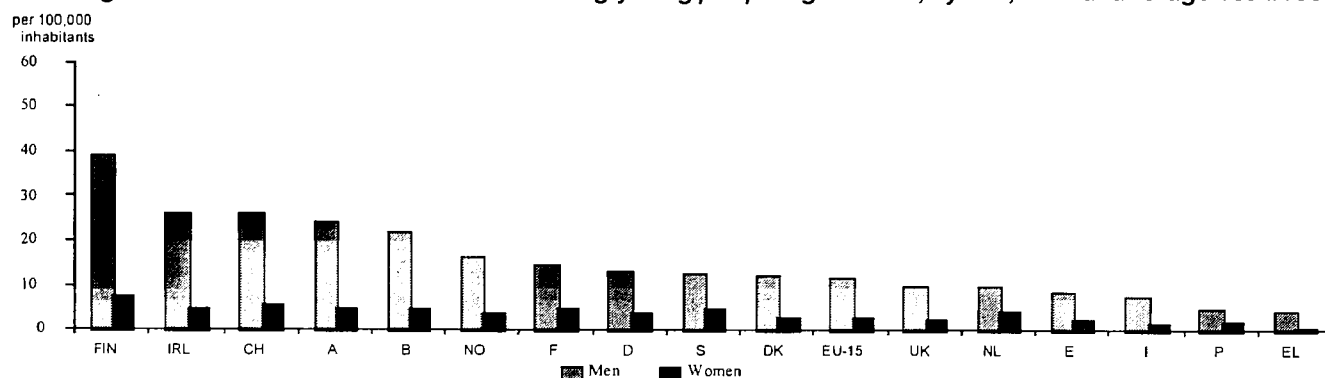
**figure 4 : Death rates due to traffic accidents among young people aged 15-24, by sex, annual average 1994/1997**



In Finland, young people, particularly men, are more likely to commit suicide than die in a traffic accident. Other countries with a relatively high suicide rate among young men are Belgium, Ireland, Austria and Switzerland. The lowest levels of recorded suicides for

both sexes are found in the four Southern Member States (Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal). International comparisons of suicide data should take account of the differences in national practices on notification and coding of causes of death (figure 5).

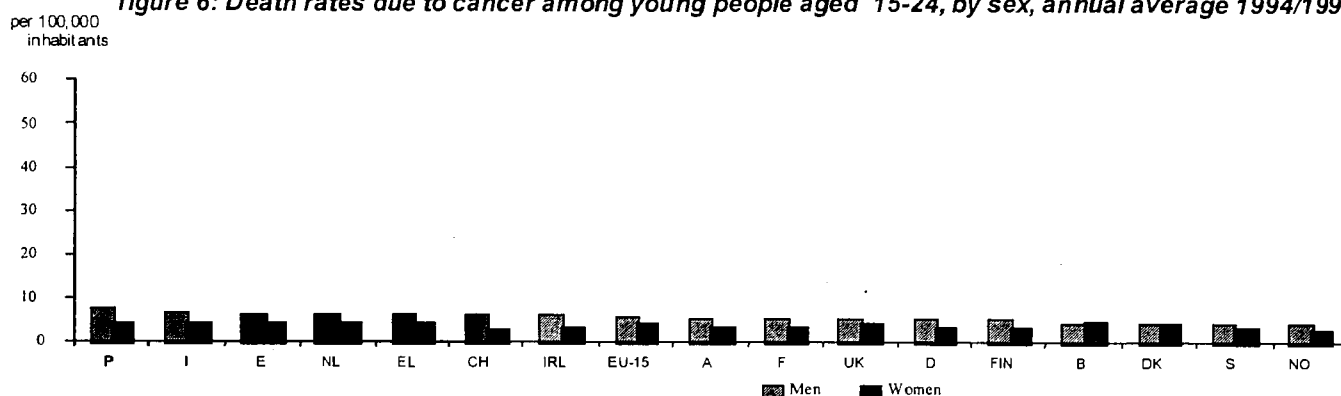
**figure 5: Death rates due to suicides among young people aged 15-24, by sex, annual average 1994/1997**



By comparison, mortality rates for cancer among this age-group are relatively low in all Member States although it is worth noting that the four Southern

Member States have among the highest rates for both men and women (figure 6).

**figure 6: Death rates due to cancer among young people aged 15-24, by sex, annual average 1994/1997**

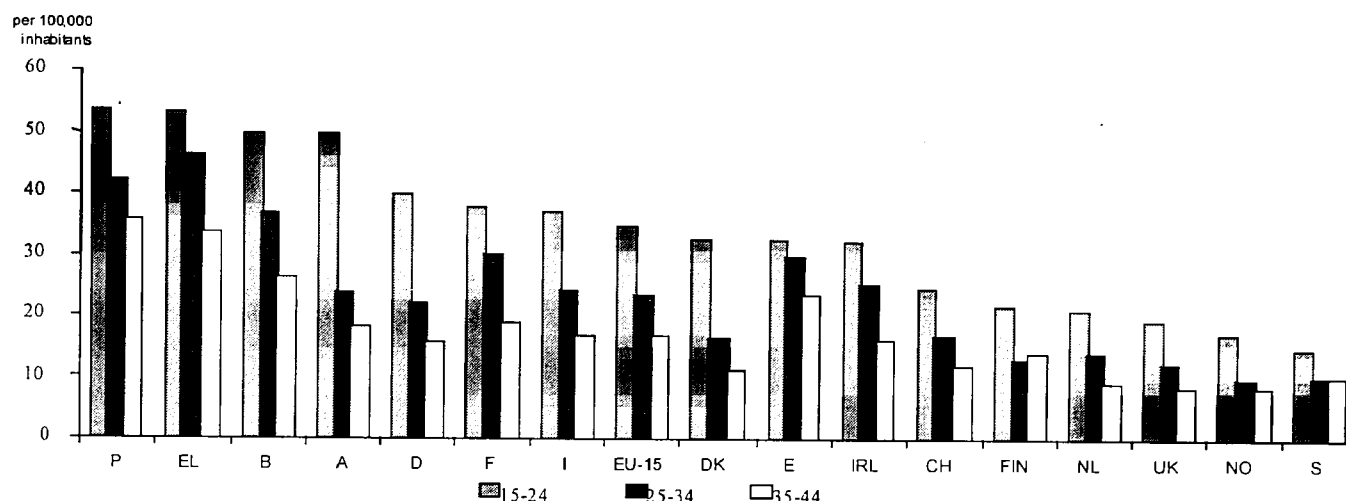


## Young people are more likely than their elders to die on the roads

EU-wide, the rate of traffic deaths among young males aged 15 to 24 is considerably higher than the rates for older age-groups: 35 per 100,000 inhabitants compared with a rate of 24 for those aged 25-34 and 17 for 35-44 year-olds. The largest gap in the death rate between

these age-groups is in Denmark, Germany and Austria (figure 7). Differences between the corresponding female generations are less pronounced but, in virtually all countries, young females aged 15 to 24 are more likely to die than their elders.

figure 7: Death rates due to traffic accidents among men by age-group, annual average 1994/1997



## In most Member States, death rates among young people are declining although the underlying causes are changing

Throughout the Union, death rates among young men and women aged 15 to 24 have been on a downward trend since 1970 (89 deaths per 100,000 in 1970 to 59 deaths per 100,000 in 1997). This is due largely to the steady decline in the number of road traffic deaths over this period (although the rate for Greece continues to increase). However, there are other underlying trends

which present a somewhat different picture. In some Member States such as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the rates have stopped declining since the mid-eighties. This is due, in part, to the slight increase in the death rate due to suicides and self-inflicted injuries in these two countries and Spain since 1970.

### ➤ ESSENTIAL INFORMATION – METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

The COD (Causes of death) data used in this report have been compiled directly from the data provided by the National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) and designated governmental agencies of the fifteen EU Member States, the EEA countries and Switzerland.

The COD selected are based on the 65-list (known as the "European shortlist") which is compatible with the 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> revision of the ICD (International Classification of Diseases) of the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The data presented are an annual average of the years 1994-1997. Data for Belgium refer to the period 1994-1995 while data for Denmark and Sweden are for 1994-1996. Longer time series from 1970 onwards are available from WHO.

Care should be taken when making direct comparisons between countries of specific causes of death. For example, data on suicides are affected by the differences in national practices on notification and coding of causes of death. Similarly, there are significant variations between Member

States in the number of deaths recorded under "Events of undetermined intent (Y10-Y34)" and "Symptoms, signs, abnormal findings, ill-defined causes (R00-R99)". For Portugal in particular the figures reported under these two categories are relatively high.

The category V01-V99 (Transport accidents) includes all types of transport accidents (road, rail, sea and air) although road traffic accidents account for the vast majority of deaths in this category. The term 'traffic accidents' is used as a synonym in the text.



# Further information:

## ➤ Reference publications

Title Key data on health 2000  
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Price EUR 29.50

## ➤ Databases

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